

The Honorable John W. Holcomb
United States District Judge
Central District of California

Dear Judge Holcomb,

I stand before you ashamed and deeply regretful for the actions that have brought me here. I take full responsibility for my choices, and I want to express my heartfelt apology. I am sorry for what I did and for the harm I have caused to the public's trust in their elected officials and to the State of California's taxing authority. I committed crimes relating to my position as Mayor of the City of Anaheim and crimes relating to private conduct where I lied to avoid paying sales tax. In doing so, I let myself down, my family down, let down the people who have supported me throughout my political career, and let down the citizens of Anaheim.

In my letter to you, I want to explain to you my life and history, and how I became involved in business and then politics, and finally, how I became involved in committing the crimes I absolutely admit here. I begin with my life.

My Life

My story begins in 1974 when I immigrated to the United States of America. I was the last member of my family to join my parents in Philadelphia. When I left India, I only had \$6 in my pocket.

I arrived in Philadelphia in February 1974, where my parents greeted me, and I stayed with them. After a couple of weeks, my father said to me, 'The only way to succeed in this country is through education.' I still remember how difficult it was for me at first to speak or understand English, especially the way people spoke outside our home.

Following my father's advice, I enrolled in community college in Philadelphia around April or May of 1974. Shortly after, my father also told me, 'You need to find a job to help pay for your education.' With five siblings in our family, my father couldn't support everyone financially. So, I started looking for work.

My first job in this country was as a janitor at the local Holiday Inn, working night shifts. I cleaned restrooms and restaurants from 11 p.m. to 2 or 3 a.m. before coming home, catching a few hours of sleep, and heading to school during the day. It was a tough life, balancing school and work, but I found it rewarding. My first paycheck was \$2.89 an hour. It was a satisfying feeling. Dad said, "Welcome to America, this is how you will build your future for our family."

I continued my life, working as a janitor and going to school. I spent about two years in Community College, and after that, I transferred to a college called Drexel University where I majored in mechanical engineering. I graduated in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering — a very proud moment for me. I had multiple job offers right after graduation. After discussing with my family, I chose to join Amtrak as an engineering trainee. The job was based in Washington, D.C., and I went through a rigorous training program.



Unfortunately, after about a year, federal budget cuts impacted Amtrak, and I was laid off. This was followed by one of the prouder moments in my life when I received my United States citizenship in 1979. My next job was as a project engineer at Crown Cork and Seal, where I worked for about one and a half years. While there, I heard about an opportunity at Kaiser Aluminum in Cupertino, California. I interviewed and was hired, so I moved to Northern California around 1980.

Unfortunately, after a year at Kaiser Aluminum, I was laid off again. This period was challenging, and finding another job was difficult. I decided to relocate to Southern California in 1981, where the weather was warmer and opportunities seemed better. I settled in Glendale, California, and eventually found work with General Dynamics, Rockwell International. Later, I joined Hughes Aircraft, where I worked until 1989 or 1990. Hughes Aircraft was eventually acquired by General Motors, and I was asked to relocate to Arizona.

My journey in America had its ups and downs, but every experience taught me resilience, adaptability, and the value of hard work, a value I have taken forward with me in my life and work and something I have hopefully imparted to my children.

I decided not to move to Arizona when Hughes Aircraft asked me to relocate in 1989. By that time, I had met my wife, Gin, in 1982, and we had developed a serious relationship and we got married in 1984. I continued working at Hughes Aircraft until 1989, but when they insisted on relocation, I decided it was time to explore other opportunities. That marked the beginning of my engineering career and entrepreneurial journey.

I started by working as a contractor, installing refrigeration and air conditioning equipment for residential and some commercial clients. During this period, I also became a licensed real estate broker. My wife and I worked hard, and within a couple of years, we saved enough money to buy our first Burger King restaurant in Hacienda Heights around 1991. Running the restaurant required a lot of dedication — I worked 8 to 15 hours a day, seven days a week — but I wanted to be successful.

After establishing our first restaurant, we reinvested our earnings and bought a second location in Mission Viejo. Burger King provided opportunities to expand ourselves further, and over the next decade, from 1991 to the early 2000s, we developed and operated around 28 restaurants (Burger King, Papa John's Pizza, El Pollo Loco) across Riverside County, San Diego County, Orange County, and Los Angeles County. It was a period of intense hard work, but also tremendous success. At this time, I also served on the Burger King Southern California Franchisee Board of Directors and Papa John's Franchisee Board of Directors.

During this time, we lived in Granada Hills, California. However, in 1994, our lives were disrupted by the Northridge earthquake which severely damaged our home. My wife insisted we move, so we relocated to Orange County. Initially, we rented a home in Anaheim Hills for six months before purchasing a house later in 1994, where we have lived ever since.

During this time, we started our family. Our daughter Sohina was born in 1992 and our son Rohan was born in 1997 bringing immense joy to our lives. She was a sweet and curious child who wanted to fit in and had many interests. I wanted to give my children all that I didn't have access to in my childhood in India. In elementary school, she wanted to play soccer, so I became a coach for a team of 9-to-10-year-olds. During my time as a coach, I met Tom Tate, a City Council member in Anaheim. We became friends as fellow businessmen, and he said, "You seem to be always willing to help people. Why don't you come and be some kind of a commissioner at the city level?" He encouraged me to get

involved in the community. He appointed me to the City's Budget Commission around 2000 or 2001. I served as a Budget Commissioner for about a year and a half.

My City Council Involvement

In 2002, a seat opened on the Anaheim City Council, and Tom encouraged me to run. After discussing it with my wife, I decided to take the leap, motivated by the desire to give back to this country and my community and help others achieve the American dream. Though I lost the 2002 election, I learned the importance of community involvement. I didn't give up. In preparation for the 2004 City Council race, I became deeply involved in the community. I hosted events at my home, supported Anaheim initiatives, raised funds for struggling individuals, and worked with nonprofits like the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA to feed and support the children in need and without support systems or families. This experience gave me insight into the challenges Anaheim faced and inspired me to think creatively about solutions.

In 2004, I ran a strong campaign, funded largely by my own resources, and won a seat on the Anaheim City Council. I served two terms, from 2004 to 2012. During my time on the Council, I spearheaded numerous initiatives and events. During this time, I had a special reception for Ambassador of India Narupa Rao and Congressman Ed Royce. I also hosted Ambassador Jay Shanker who today is a Foreign Minister of India, and Nisha Desai Biswal, who at that time was the President of the US-India Business Council, and Ambassador of India Taranjit Singh Sandhu at my home in Anaheim. In 2019, hosted high level representatives of the economic development delegation for the state government of Tamil Nadu at the request of the Council General of India Sanjay Panday. Over those last 12 years I was hosting an annual Indian Independence Day, cultural exchange, and community building events which local, national, and international people have attended. Again, this is going back all the way up to 2004.

During January of 2020, I visited Washington DC for the Mayor's Conference where I was invited by President Trump to the White House. He later asked me if I could stay for a signing ceremony in the East room. The White House staff called me again in February 2020, during President Trump's visit to Los Angeles. I, as the Mayor of Anaheim, and the Mayor of Lancaster were the only ones who greeted him on the tarmac at LAX.

As a City Council member during that time, I worked on and supported many different things. My tenure focused on fostering international collaboration and supporting local development. Serving on the City Council was an honor and a way for me to give back to the community that had given me so much.

It all goes back to making a major difference in the community. I was very happy that after I left the City Council, I joined the Board of Directors for the Orange County Water District Board representing City of Anaheim. I was recognized as Elected Official of The Year for 2012 by Anaheim Business Awards for envisioning and implementing the free Anaheim OC job fair from 2009 to 2012, which helped to reduce unemployment in Orange County. This fair placed about 1,700 jobs county wide with support from the Anaheim enterprise zone designation. Another public service I was very proud of was to start the free health fair. I started with a group of around 100 Indian-American doctors and I said, "Why don't we do a health fair in Anaheim giving completely free health checkups." Our free health fair, that I began in 2008, is continuing today and gives the public free access to doctors ranging from women's health/OBGYN, dentists, optometrists, internal medicine, cardiologists, and other medical providers. It is my privilege to see that even today, in 2024, it is the official Anaheim health fair for the City. Since I started, these doctors are still continuing to participate in the free health fair and helping the unfortunate and the poor people of Anaheim and Orange County.

My Time as Mayor

In 2018, I ran for the Mayor of Anaheim and I won the seat. During my time as Mayor, the first issue I addressed was the homelessness crisis in our City. Days after entering office, we opened an emergency interim homeless shelter that allowed more than 200 people to get off the streets during the cold and rainy winter. The opening of this shelter allowed for the clearing of the unsustainable and inhumane West Anaheim homeless encampments at Maxwell and Schweitzer parks, and the corner of Magnolia and La Palma Avenues, La Palma park in Downtown Anaheim, and outside the businesses in the Platinum Triangle and in the Anaheim Resort. The effort restored the Hackett Public Library, the public places listed above, and other spaces for school children, families and businesses. Actions we took on this interim shelter allowed Anaheim to address the worst impacts of homelessness months earlier. All of this was under the general oversight of the United States District Court for the Central District of California by the Honorable David O. Carter. In conjunction with this, I joined Chrysalis Orange County -- a City supported employment and job training nonprofit for those recovering from homelessness and other obstacles. Initiatives like this one are important to me, as providing shelter only does so much. I remember the feeling after working my janitor job and enrolling in community college and the boost to my self-esteem, motivation, and the power of feeling capable. That same year, I also celebrated the second graduating class of the Anaheim Emprendedoras Program which is a free program to support the City's aspiring entrepreneurs offered entirely in Spanish. Again, from my own experience in learning English fluently in my first years here - I want to be of help and support in bridging these gaps. It is important to me to foster a nurturing environment for young folks. This was aligned with my values and hopes for my term in office, empowering others and supporting pathways for the American Dream.

During my time in the City as Mayor, we got hit with COVID-19 which was the greatest challenge we had in office and an enormous responsibility. The City had to shut down the Disneyland Hotels, the Anaheim Convention Center, the Honda Center. Every City employee was working from home at that time. Despite all the cuts and hardship, I made sure none of the City's 3,000 employees lost their jobs. Most businesses during this time were closed except for a few essential businesses. I lead the City in stepping up to provide more than \$70 million dollars in community and economic support that included rent assistance, help with utility bills, food for families and seniors, business grants, face-masks for residents and restaurants, internet access for remote learning, and of course our on-going efforts to reduce homelessness. The City Council and I decided to open the Anaheim Convention Center and Disneyland parking lot for testing and giving COVID vaccines. We tested more than 125,000 and vaccinated around 500,000 people this way. We got our City over 70% protected with at least one vaccine. Lastly, while in office I set an initiative to invest \$250 million dollars in Anaheim neighborhoods in the coming years with the spending led directly by resident's feedback.

My Involvement in Sale of Angel Stadium

From the start, I have always believed that it was in the best interests of Anaheim to keep the Angels in the City. Anaheim benefits from being the hub of entertainment in Orange County and is recognized nationwide. Not only the Angels, but Disneyland and other interests create an enormous income and development base for the City. Keeping these keys entities in Anaheim is the key to not only City development, but the income sources that allow the City to help the disadvantaged citizens who live in Anaheim. Losing the Angels would have been devastating to the City. During my time on the Council, I saw many factions which wanted to press their interests even if it meant losing the Angels. In my view, they did not see the connection between the income from the Angels and the other services provided by Anaheim to the people they were trying to protect. For this reason, I was very focused on keeping the Angels in Anaheim.

Keeping the Angels stadium in Anaheim was one of my key goals when I first ran for office and a promise I made to my residents. The sale process involved negotiating terms that would benefit the community, including building affordable housing, office towers, parks, a fire station, and community centers. The initial negotiations went quite well, I was only one part of the negotiating team which consisted of a collaborative effort with City attorneys, consultants, and staff.

Where I Went Wrong and Committed Criminal Acts

Before I describe the facts, which are also in the plea agreement, I would like you to know that I voluntarily resigned my position as Mayor in May 2022, 8 months before my term would end. I was not ordered to do this, but it was the right thing, and I did that.

As part of the negotiating team, I was sent an email from City personnel summarizing key deal points for the City's position in the negotiations. I then emailed these points to Todd Ament and an Angels consultant. Mr. Ament was the President of the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce and part of the economic development team. He was someone I trusted and a political advisor to me as well. The email I sent was from my personal email and included these points.

I regret sending the points even though doing this was not a crime. It put me into a difficult political situation, and I then committed a crime to cover it up by deleting them. I should never have done this. I will now talk personally about the crimes I committed, which are listed in my plea agreement.

First about Anaheim: When I used my private email account to send confidential information to Mr. Ament and the Angels consultant, I was trying to get a Stadium deal done because I believed that it was critical to keep the Angels in Anaheim. There had already been a lawsuit over the team's name which the City lost, and I thought that losing the Angels would be very bad for the City. When I later learned that there was an investigation into the Stadium deal, I deleted my emails to Mr. Ament because I was afraid that they would become public and make me look bad politically in my reelection campaign. This was a criminal act, and I am responsible and ashamed for my crime.

Over a year later after the City and Angels had reached a Stadium deal which I truly believe to this day was in the City's interest and supported by an overwhelming majority of the citizens, Todd Ament invited me to breakfast. I was relaxed with Todd Ament and considered him an ally. I had no idea that he was recording me and that he was under investigation by the federal authorities. At that time, over a year after the events, I proudly bragged to Todd Ament as the plea agreement quotes about pushing and expecting donations. I never had an agreement with the Angels to use my position as mayor to approve a Stadium deal much less in exchange for a campaign donation, and I never asked the Angels for a campaign donation after the Stadium deal was reached. When I told Mr. Ament that I intended to do so, I was boasting about the value of my work and expressing pride in what I had contributed. Nevertheless, I said what the plea agreement quotes, and I am guilty for doing and saying that.

Months later, when the FBI agent approached me as I was leaving a political event and confronted me about my emails and statements to Mr. Ament, I panicked and lied because I knew it would make me look bad in my reelection campaign. Political expediency is not an excuse for destroying evidence and lying to the FBI and I am very sorry.

Second about the helicopter in Arizona: I lied about living in Arizona to avoid paying approximately \$16,000 of sales tax when I bought a helicopter. I have no excuse for this conduct. After being confronted with my actions, but before I was charged, I paid the full taxes and penalties owed to California and corrected the false documents I had submitted stating that I lived in Arizona. While these steps do not undo my wrongdoing, they reflect my commitment to taking responsibility and making things right where I can.

I share these details not to excuse my actions but to take responsibility and to ask for your understanding. I never used my position as a public official for personal profit, and I never sold political favors for campaign contributions, and I am not charged with that. I took shortcuts and acted in a secretive way in the Stadium negotiations to reach a deal that I believed was in the City's best interests and was overwhelmingly supported by the citizens of Anaheim. When I realized how my political opponents would characterize my conduct if my emails to Mr. Ament became public, I destroyed the emails and lied to the FBI agent about it. I have no explanation for avoiding the helicopter sales tax besides not wanting to pay it.

I am deeply ashamed of my conduct and understand that there are consequences for my crimes. I have learned hard lessons from this experience, including disgracing my family and destroying my career and reputation. I felt this way before my plea and that is why I voluntarily resigned from my elected position. I am determined to go forward with integrity to rebuild my life.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak directly to you.

Sincerely,



HARISH SIDHU

